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Participation and collaboration in contemporary art : a game without borders between art and 'real' life

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Chapter 2

A UNIVERSE OF RELATIONS: (UN)DOING PRACTICE.

COMMUNITY PRACTICES AS ART

INTRODUCTION

The making of relations in community-based art

What kinds of relations are produced within or by means of long-term, socio-politically engaged, participatory projects initiated by artists with regard to a particular group of people? What kinds of relations are presented and represented there and how? How do projects that focus on specific communities relate to the wider context of the social or political issues, for which the selected communities could be considered case studies? And what is the connection between relations produced as art and relations of art production? What does one assume to belong to the produced content, and what to the context of production, what to be art and what not in such participatory/collaborative projects? These are all questions at the core of this chapter.

Two case studies will be considered. The first one is the process-based, public art project TAMA by Greek artist Maria Papadimitriou. TAMA was developed between 1998 and 2002 in Avliza, an unknown location on the outskirts of Athens in Greece, occupied by nomadic populations of Roma and Vlach-Rumanian Greeks. TAMA stands for *Temporary Autonomous Museum for All*, a title that refers to the proposal of taking the space and images of relations with and within the Avliza community as departure point for imagining how relations could be between art and life in today's world. Papadimitriou set out to initiate communication networks between Avliza inhabitants, herself and people involved mostly in art and architecture. Simultaneously, a proposal was put together for an infrastructural plan tailored to the needs and lifestyle of nomadic populations.

The second case study is the (on-going since 2001) project *Gudran for Art and Development* in a small and socially isolated fishing village called El Max, outside the

city of Alexandria in Egypt. Even though initiated by a group of Egyptian artists, they do not consider Gudran as an art project. Rather, they view it as a project where art is used for the social, infrastructural and economic development of El Max. Gudran combines the development of relations between the village inhabitants, the Gudran team and the outside world, with development of the infrastructure, as well as with the development of creative and professional skills of the villagers. Central figures in the group are Sameh El Halawany and Aliaa El Gready.

As in the pilot case study of Jeanne van Heeswijk, so also in this chapter, the question of art refers to the aesthetic or representational operation of certain practices adapted by artists. In the case of Van Heeswijk, practices of everyday life were re-produced as practices of art. Here, practices of community-based, mostly social work are re-produced by artists, sometimes calling it art (TAMA) and sometimes not (Gudran). But in both cases the content and operational structure of the artists' practices bear important similarities. It seems partly to be a question of which field (art or other) the artists operate within, whether they call their practice art or not. So for TAMA and Gudran I will be looking into the formation and operational structure of the artists' practice of producing relations, in order to show how, when re-produced as art, these practices re-present the formation and operation of relations in the "real" world. Consequently, the critique on the artistic practice of producing relations as art, can be re-produced back as a critique of relations – social, political or other - in the "real" world. Having said that, I am practically repeating the conclusions of the section "Relations" in Part I, as well as anticipating those of this chapter. My target here is to turn into a method of analysis what was suggested in Part I.

There are a number of reasons for choosing TAMA and Gudran as case studies here. For both projects the establishment of relations constitutes an aim (e.g., relations between the communities and the outside world), method (collaborative/participatory) and content (relations between particular agents). The relation of art to life, narrowly understood as the priority of images versus action, or of aesthetic autonomy versus social relevance, determines in each project whether the artists call their practices "art" (as in TAMA) or "social work" (as in Gudran). In both cases partnerships are negotiated at multiple levels: with and within the communities of Avliza and El Max, regarded as location- and culture-specific; with and within the expanding urban centers of Athens and Alexandria; with and within the changing landscapes of national and international contemporary art production; with and within national and international politico-economic developments that affect the communities as much as they affect the artists. Furthermore, as I will try to analyze, each project is constituted by an inherent discrepancy between an image of relations that the projects aim at presenting (e.g., ideal partnerships between artists and disenfranchised communities) and representations produced by the operation of relations (production partnerships supporting the projects' implementation). What I will try to show is that this discrepancy should not be narrowly considered as a contradiction between art (e.g., images, ideals of relations) and "real" life (artworld relations). Rather, It should lead to a reconsideration of what new forms of making art have been configured within a domain of art, and what they "formulate" about the world.

Especially in the case of TAMA, by inviting art people (artists, curators, collectors etc.) to contribute to the creation of the art project, the artist consciously

causes from the outset a merging of relations of art production with relations produced as art. However, in TAMA's official narrations the consequences of what this merging means whether for art theory, or for the institutional legitimization of practices that fall within a domain of art are not addressed.

Before closing this introduction let me indicate some practical points regarding research and analysis in this chapter. Firstly, issues such as globalization, peripheral modernities, identity construction, notions of "community" and discourses of the "Other," which usually dominate in discussions about community-based art from so-called peripheral countries, are here only a background feature. The focus is on the production and operation of relations as art. Secondly, the research carried out for both case studies dates back to 2003-2005. This is the time-frame of my analysis. TAMA was regarded as complete project already in 2002. Which means that all official and unofficial narrations used refer to something officially finished. Whereas Gudran is continuing still today. Consequently, whatever I propose about Gudran in 2004 may not be applicable later. To emphasize this time-frame I will be using past tense in my discussion of Gudran. Thirdly, an amount of information that significantly shaped my views and interpretations of the projects came from informal discussions - as opposed to set meetings and recorded interviews particularly for my PhD research - which cannot be retrieved here as concrete references. This was inevitable. The projects developed within art field networks that I have myself had contact with. However, even in informal discussions, all of my interlocutors were aware of my PhD research on engaged and participatory public art.³⁰⁷ Fourthly and finally, in my analysis I am sometimes quite skeptical regarding discrepancies between the stated agendas and intentions of the artists' initiatives and what seems to have taken place during the projects' implementation. This skepticism was not amongst the reasons for selecting these case studies. To the contrary, they were picked out because they were becoming increasingly visible within art and art-related networks I was interested in, as innovative and successful cases of participatory/collaborative community-based practices. The discovery of problematic aspects came later during research. To my approach, they comprise important aspects in the phenomenon of the spread and the positive artworld reception of community-based, collaborative/participatory practices of artists during the past about fifteen years. But they do not constitute the ultimate criterion of the projects' evaluation as art.

Notes on theory

At first glance both TAMA and Gudran could fit into the most widespread theoretical paradigms of usually American origin for community-based, site-specific art. Yet they simultaneously fall outside the scope of the social, cultural, political and artistic conditions and traditions that gave rise to those approaches. For instance, the case studies could be discussed in terms of Suzanne Lacy's "new genre public art," because they engage in the art making process diverse audiences, whose lives are directly affected by the social or political issues handled in the projects.³⁰⁸ Yet Lacy's approach to artistic activism is connected to the conservative Reagan administration of the 1980s in the United States,

Community-based, ethnographic or site-specific art: Models of critique and theory from the United States

which provoked a backlash of organized activism on feminist, gender, racial, AIDS, environmental and other issues. These political and social conditions are very different to those of Greece or Egypt in the 1980s (or later in the 1990s).³⁰⁹ Furthermore, TAMA reminds one of the “Artist as Ethnographer” model of Hal Foster.³¹⁰ Yet again, the notion of autonomy as a condition of critical art discussed by Foster with reference to Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Artist as Producer” and to the critique of “bourgeois capitalist institutions of art (the museum, the academy, the market and the media),” does not necessarily correspond to notions of art’s autonomy and criticality in a Greek context.³¹¹ Besides, in that context, the ethnography of a postcolonial “Other,” as well as the notion of the artist as social activist are historically and culturally also not very relevant. The same also goes for the ethics and aesthetics in Miwon Kwon’s critique regarding community-based art by artists making international careers with site-specific projects.³¹² On the one hand, Kwon’s claims about the discovery or production of “sited” or “invented” communities, and their potential social re-marginalization and aesthetic objectification instead of emancipation and political subjectivization, could be relevant to the projects in this chapter.³¹³ However on the other, the genealogy of site-specificity since the 1960s that Kwon suggests – phenomenological or experiential, social/institutional and discursive – is itself too specific to a Western European and North American canon.³¹⁴ In the historical-political conditions of, for instance, the post-civil war 1950s in Greece and the 1967-1974 dictatorship, the content and priorities of social and political movements differed considerably to those in other Western states, and so did the art.

Artists’ Initiatives. I believe that the *contextualizing* problems that the aforementioned examples of theoretical models cannot cater for, are more aptly addressed in approaches to a global phenomenon by authors such as, for instance, Gerardo Mosquera, Charles Esche or Reinaldo Laddaga.³¹⁵ These authors approached the appearance of collective artists’ initiatives (often in collaboration with other disciplines), which occurred around the globe during the 1990s, critically but without proposing theoretical models.³¹⁶ The initiatives I have in mind combine a local initial focus with a global perspective of the conditions and issues at stake. For instance, the specific local focus in TAMA and Gudran is on Avliza and El Max, but regarded with a wider perspective of the viability of communities living at the fringes of booming urban centers – here Athens and Alexandria – and globalized economies.³¹⁷ A strong language of activism and oppositionality has retreated from the artists’ vocabulary. This occurred partly in recognition that the monster to confront – here the local and global economic and cultural conditions affecting specific communities – is also the source of the artists’ initiatives’ potentiality of existence and operation.³¹⁸ Because their work too, depends on their involvement with local and global actions and networks of similarly specialized and similarly-minded groups.³¹⁹ The artists are still concerned about issues such as art’s autonomy, criticality and its potential for political and social intervention. However, the handling of these issues is set on new grounds when artists, as well as art critics and theorists, realize that processes of politico-economic globalization and its local specificities decisively configure the conditions and potential of artists’ social interventions.³²⁰

To an important extent, my approach to the operation of artists' practices, whether called art (*TAMA*) or not (Gudran), calls up Jacques Rancière's understanding of "artistic practices." For Rancière, "artistic practices" are "'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making", as well as in the relationships they maintain to forms of being and modes of visibility."³²¹ Which in the case of my object of study resonates with "ways of doing and making" from the depository of everyday life practices, of activists' practices, or of NGOs' community work practices that are re-produced here as artistic practices, i.e. as "ways of doing and making" art. By and large they retain (re-produce) their original forms, despite entering a different domain, the domain of art. In that sense, my question regarding the operation of these practices when re-produced as art, reminds one of Rancière's theory about the relation between art and life in the "aesthetic regime" of the arts. Where the notion of *the aesthetic* "strictly refers to the specific mode of being of whatever falls within the domain of art, the mode of being of the objects of art."³²² This mode in Rancière's aesthetic regime of the arts is "a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products." So if I take here the community projects of my case studies to be "artistic products," based on the condition of a transition of certain "ways of doing and making" from a domain of "real" life, as it were, to a domain of art, then my question is: what is their *aesthetic* operation?

If we follow Rancière, their operation as artistic products should relate to what they render sensible, i.e. visible, audible, thinkable, about the world. And their capacity to do that relates directly to what *can* be seen, heard, thought, made or done at a certain point in time. It relates to forms of being and modes of visibility that are possible in a certain community at a certain time. And these depend on the distribution of the occupations, of times and places amongst groups, the divisions between those who are considered as belonging to the community and those who are not, those who act and those who are acted upon.³²³

Anyhow in my conclusions to this chapter I will also return to the operation of art as representation, which in Rancière's theoretical approach to art would lead to combining the "aesthetic regime" of the arts with the "representational regime" of the arts. Formally, these two regimes stand in contrast in Rancière's theoretical model, because they present two different systems of understanding art, i.e. of understanding what makes art and what art makes. Nonetheless, as the possibility of each system of understanding art is historically constituted, Rancière maintains that in practice the two regimes may occasionally overlap.³²⁴

Now I have taken a whole detour to talk about the philosopher Jacques Rancière, though I do not intend in this chapter to either apply, or rely on his concepts. The focus will be on elaborating on the specificity of certain forms and practices of art, rather than on applying more general theories of art. Nonetheless, placing attention to Rancière's approach from the outset is useful particularly in this chapter from at least three perspectives. Firstly, it serves to remind us that the question of *art* with regard to any kind of practice, is essentially a question of form ("ways of doing and making"), rather than of theme, agenda or theory. These three will be approached here through the question of form. Secondly, it opens up possibilities of thinking about aesthetic capacities and operations in objects and

practices (here the community-based projects) that *may or may not* be produced as art. Because Rancière's thinking about the aesthetic regime is very much connected to the phenomenon of the re-production by artists of non-art objects and practices as art, but without changing their formal characteristics (i.e. without representing them in other forms or media).³²⁵ Thirdly, Rancière's proposal of how aesthetic products may give comprehensible form to the distribution of the sensible at a given point in time, a distribution that is directly linked to the distribution of occupations "that upholds the apportionment of domains of activity" within a community, is particularly interesting for this chapter.³²⁶ Because this chapter discusses precisely the aesthetic operation of relations produced as art.

1 THE TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS MUSEUM FOR ALL AN ART PROJECT BY MARIA PAPADIMITRIOU

The artist and her project

TAMA is located in Avliza, a run-down area in western Athens, 10 km away from the center of the capital and very close to the new Olympic village. Itinerant populations such as Gypsies and Vlach Romanians from north of Greece use this area as a pied-à-terre. My discovery was accidental, but my involvement was intentional. It came as a natural sequence of my attitude as an artist. I visited the place for the first time in 1998 with my friends Catherine and Michel, looking for old furniture at good prices. But when I found myself there, it was not the antiques that attracted me but the place itself; haphazardous layout, unexpected events, unplanned art works, strange people. What I saw there is the concept of a makeshift settlement, a kind of mobile post-urban city which serves its inhabitants' temporary housing needs and economic activities. Everything forms part of this small town. Landscape-clothes-interiors-unfinished buildings-streets-cars-the sky-the people. I started to visit Avliza everyday – I became an addicted visitor. The observation of place and people became my foremost duty. I wanted to become friends with them, to participate in their fiestas, to share their problems, to listen to their thoughts and needs; after a long time I had it, and a strong relationship started. The nomadic way of living and the particularities of the community gave me the idea of setting a system of communication and exchange among the inhabitants, myself, the art people and the public. In a very short time I realized that all my friends and associates wanted to participate in this story which I call the temporary autonomous museum for all.³²⁷ (Maria Papadimitriou)

In the above Maria Papadimitriou explains how she became acquainted with the settlement in Avliza (municipality of Menidi, Athens) in 1998, and how from that personal relationship the art project TAMA came about. In an interview for this study the artist further explained that what she initially "saw" in Avliza were *images*, which immediately reminded her of works by contemporary artists like Thomas Schütte, Martin Kippenberger, Thomas Hirschhorn or Vanessa Beecroft (for images

see www.tama.gr).³²⁸ The residents of Avliza lived in improvised constructions, tents and ISO Boxes, without proper electricity and water supply and without paved streets.³²⁹ However, the place had a tremendous effect on her, aesthetically as well as emotionally.³³⁰ In her mind it started giving shape to what a contemporary art museum could be like today: a site of aesthetic and social interaction in progress between the art world and the public. In 1998 Athens still lacked a national museum for modern or contemporary art.³³¹

In the same interview Papadimitriou explains that for a long time after her first visit she did not consider the personal relationship she started to cultivate with people in Avliza as art.³³² Feeling that it was a disgrace for people of such strong and old traditions to live under unacceptable conditions, she started helping the children with their lessons, bringing clothes, food, her own doctors and certain friends and acquaintances including professionals across the arts, architects and sociologists to share her experiences there and arouse their interest. She encouraged them to create and contribute something. For example, the architects Andreas Angelidakis and Eleni Kostika offered a design for a playground. Others like the writer Sissi Tax and the anthropologist Maria Karamitsopoulou reflected on their visit in texts. Artists such as DeAnna Maganias, Apostolos Georgiou or Katerina Würthle contributed a painting or drawing, and so on. Contributions were later gathered in the project's book. Additionally, she started investigating what the Roma of Avliza, as a socially disenfranchised minority group, were officially eligible to from the European Union and the Greek State in terms of financial support, infrastructure, education and medical care.³³³ No surprise, most approved subsidies ended up in the pockets of officials, with the collaboration of some Romani leaders. Thus most social and development projects were remaining frozen.³³⁴

Officially TAMA lasted between 1998 and 2002. It is not clear when and how the initial personal contacts and activities of Papadimitriou in Avliza were turned into an art project. Once they were, the project developed mainly in two, interwoven directions. On the one hand, by inviting people to Avliza, the artist became a liaison for "setting up," as she explained, "a system of communication and exchange among inhabitants, myself, the art people and the public."³³⁵ On the other hand, these relations led to the development of a plan of primary architectural constructions tailored to the particularities of the Roma's nomadic lifestyle. The artist in collaboration with the architects Dora Papadimitriou (Maria's sister) and Hariklia Hari (collaborator of Maria also in an earlier project, *Kiss from Greece*) observed and studied the everyday life, the needs, the ways of living etc. of the Roma in the context also of the Greek state. In consultation with community members they designed a series of flexible buildings. The architects' leading principle was that they should design primary structures combining the provision of basic living quality standards with the special needs of itinerant population around the globe. The infrastructure plan included models for a private family house and for public buildings catering for the community's social, cultural and economic needs.³³⁶

Such an experimental collaboration between artists and architects with a social activist character might seem commonplace in many Western countries. However, in Greece it was not. There had been some examples of artists' interventions in public spaces, of interactive art projects, as well as of exchanges between artists,

architects and urban planners.³³⁷ But these have never led, for instance, to systematic models of applying art to architecture like in part of Dutch public art or the German Kunst am Bau, or of activist art like the American new genre public art, or even to “ethnographic” artistic practices as Hal Foster has discussed them for international artists.³³⁸

To return to TAMA, the initial circle of private individuals sharing individual experiences started opening up when from approximately 2001 the project started attracting the interest of Greek and foreign art critics and curators. Its selection as the official participation of Greece in the 25th Sao Paulo Biennial was a culminating point. TAMA saw its book published and the construction in Avliza of an open-air pavilion, the *Periptero de Cultur*, designed as a contribution by the artist Fabiana de Barros, all funded by the Greek Ministry of Culture. TAMA traveled further to the Tirana Biennial, the Manifesta 4 in Frankfurt, the Fridericianum in Kassel and so on. The project’s international career in Biennials and thematic exhibitions took off beyond any other project by a Greece-based artist in years. In 2003 Maria Papadimitriou won the prestigious Greek contemporary art prize of the DESTE Foundation.³³⁹

The project was proposed for Sao Paulo by art curator and critic Efi Strousa, pioneer and respected figure on the Greek art scene.³⁴⁰ Strousa and, before her, the architect and independent curator Yorghos Tzirtzilakis (architecture lecturer in the same department of Architecture, University of Thessaly, where Papadimitriou teaches art), formulated TAMA’s theoretical framework. Their texts practically brought together all the activities, connecting the images and themes derived from the artist’s initiatives in Avliza into a coherent narration documented in the project’s book.³⁴¹ TAMA was theoretically contextualized within timely issues in art world and academic discourses: nomadism and displacement; minorities and refugees; urbanization and the postmodern city (Athens as an urban conglomerate); artistic utopianism and smart design for experimental architecture; notions of “local” and “global,” “private” and “public,” “space” and “place” and - especially for the arts - the concepts of “institutions” and “autonomy,” “participation,” “engagement” and “open-endedness.” TAMA embraced them all. And even with a resourceful metaphoric character in the ways that issues, categories and concepts were presented in sets of somehow unequal equivalents: a nomad Roma community in a postmodern world of nomad citizens (e.g., artists, students, the managerial class); Avliza’s “free settlement as an anomaly within an equally anomalous suburban growth,” to quote Strousa; the images of Roma life as containing “worlds and myths (like the spectre of Carmen), ...which we love and hate at the same time... which provide a recognizable (exotic) identity as much as they perpetuate exclusions and marginalizations,” according to Tzirtzilakis; a juxtaposition of art institutions and Hakim Bey’s T.A.Z., the *Temporary Autonomous Zone*.³⁴² In art exhibitions, displays took the form of series of photographs, installations and environments. These displays seemed to function either as metaphors for TAMA as an experience of Avliza and for the Romani’s itinerant life style and makeshift shelters, or they communicated the idea of “seeing” in images of Avliza images of art.³⁴³

In the last couple of months before the Sao Paulo Biennial and especially during the press conference at the Ministry of Culture, some art collectors agreed to undertake

costs for implementing the proposed constructions, provided the state would allot the land.³⁴⁴ In fact Avliza - and Menidi in general - were already contested terrains: plans for the 2004 Olympic Games village placed it in Menidi and very close, potentially even over the location of Avliza.³⁴⁵ According to the artist, a legal case for land expropriation driving Romani inhabitants out was suspended.³⁴⁶ Suspended was apparently also – or “soon to be announced,” as the minister was reported to have explained during the press conference – a series of measures to upgrade rundown districts close by the Olympic village, including Avliza.³⁴⁷ In that respect, the support of TAMA could be said to have closely matched governmental program statements about cultural and social actions accompanying the 2004 Olympiad. No state initiatives were eventually realized for the Roma.³⁴⁸

No other TAMA construction was realized either after the *Periptero de Cultur*, which was actually destroyed by locals who, according to Papadimitriou, wanted the wood for heating.³⁴⁹ When asked about her aspired state of TAMA’s completion, the artist responded that she considered it a finished project (1998-2002), as it formed a complete architectural proposal responding to the needs of itinerant populations. Ideally, she would have liked to see the model house built especially for the family that had supported her the most.³⁵⁰ Interestingly, in discussions I had with two individuals actively involved in TAMA, one maintained that the intention had been for the constructions to *be* realized. Therefore a budget was calculated and Papadimitriou had seriously pursued a strategic combination of collectors’ and state support.³⁵¹ Whereas according to the other, TAMA was completed at the level of a proposal. Not only would the constructions’ realization not add anything to TAMA as an art project, but this prospect would lead to the artist being exploited by the Roma. This contradiction of opinions manifests the ever-recurring question of engaged art’s relation to society and “real” life. Should art remain a realm of utopian representations, presenting the world with ideals like the partnership between Roma and art people, while itself remaining autonomous from the expediency of “real” world relations that include a possible “exploitation by the Roma”? Or should art seek to instigate change all the way to tangible results?

In the following pages I will argue that for process-based, participatory/collaborative, public art projects like TAMA or Gudran, as examples of community art initiatives that emerged in the 1990s around the globe, the terms of the above approach should be reconsidered. The first question to ask is: what is understood as the important part of the art practice? Is it the *ideal* of relations proposed and the *expected outcomes* of the project? This would mean that the form of participation/collaboration as an art form is understood foremost for what it stands for as a democratic or social ideal. If this is what is at stake, then neither the form of the participatory/collaborative process as the form of the process-based art project’s operation is addressed, nor what the art project does precisely by being produced as such (i.e. as a process-based, participatory/collaborative, public art project).

To elucidate what I mean, I will rather try to approach the questions of what comprises the artists’ practice and how it functions, by breaking down various relations operating in the conceptualization, creation and production of the projects. In TAMA these relations included the artist as initiator, organizer and mediator, the Avliza inhabitants and various people connected to the field of contemporary cultural

production - mainly artists, architects, curators, collectors and even cultural policy makers. It was Maria Papadimitirou's aim to establish all these relations as part of the art project. This entails that relations with Avliza residents, artists, curators etc. in their capacities, roles and interests precisely as Avliza residents, artists or curators, operate simultaneously as personal relations, professional artworld relations, *and* as relations produced as art. Consequently, the autonomy of the art as a question concerning the autonomy of the artist's creation from external – e.g., artworld – interests is not applicable in these terms.³⁵² Besides, closer inspection also shows several other ways in which a notion of autonomy as a condition of art's relation to “real” life presents important problematic aspects. If it is still a meaningful notion, its contours should be reconfigured.

The Roma community of Avliza

The Romani people in Greece belong to a number of different tribes with different names (e.g. Tziganes, Vlach-Romanians, Chalkidaioi), dialects, religions, as well as with varying levels of integration within wider Greek society.³⁵³ This cultural and social diversity within the Roma is unknown to most people in Greece.³⁵⁴ Common to the different groups are various strong traditions visible in their everyday life, as well as a certain insularity towards outsiders. This isolation tendency is also linked to Greek society's prejudices against the Roma.³⁵⁵ Prejudices and racism are occasionally reported to be reproduced even by local authorities or the police.³⁵⁶

In TAMA's formal narratives the Avliza Romani are regarded as one community. A community that pre-existed the artist's discovery of it, is location-specific (Avliza) and culture-specific (described for instance, as Gypsies and Vlach Romanians from the north of Greece).³⁵⁷ For all the emphasis on participation and collaboration, the artist never pretended that TAMA was not foremost derived from her own, personal fascination with, and interpretation of, the image of Avliza.³⁵⁸ Consequently, it seems fair to say that the artist's questions of aesthetics, of images, of the concept of art in contemporary society were given priority. While the pragmatic social and political issues (e.g., infrastructure, minorities' rights) were addressed within the above frame.

In this section I will elaborate on the participation and representation of the Roma community of Avliza in the process of producing and presenting TAMA as an art project. To start with, the Avliza inhabitants were the initial source of inspiration, and ever since the constant point of reference in the process of encouraging contributions from various agents with the artist acting as liaison. Following the artist's frequent visits, in particular one family opened up their house to her, offering her space as an “office.” Avliza residents participated in the design of TAMA's architecture as consultants. The known in Greece Roma musician Yorghos Mangas played for the video TAMA *Sentimental* and he also traveled to Sao Paulo. Further, Avliza residents were invited to public presentations of TAMA such as the Sao Paulo press conference in Athens, where one family showed up.

Looking at the development of the project, one gains the impression that the role of Avliza residents as participating subjects in the process must have been more active when friends and acquaintances of the artist were invited to Avliza, and when

ideas about infrastructure for nomads were produced by the artist and the architects in consultation with inhabitants. One could talk about a stage of more personal relations, for which Papadimitriou's friendship with Avliza inhabitants was crucial. In the curator's text the autonomy of the artist's gesture is explained as derived from the independency of intimate relationships, especially with a couple of families.³⁵⁹ This is important, because when TAMA as a *public* art project embraced the involvement of major art world agents and even cultural policy makers, it still relied on a rhetoric of autonomy based on the artist's intimate relations as private motive. Which means that a concept of art as an autonomous domain, justified on an alleged autonomy of intimacy (the privacy and disinterestedness of friendship) seems to have been fundamental for TAMA's theoretical and narrative construction and legitimization as a public art project. Even when, in the process of the project's expansion towards institutional agents and away from grassroots experiences, these foundations of the concept of autonomy were essentially deconstructed.

With respect to representations of relations among and with the Avliza Romani, there are several viewpoints one could take. Starting with a rather pragmatic one, Avliza is in fact occupied by various groups of Roma. In discussions with individuals actively involved in TAMA I heard that the project was developed in collaboration with just one group, which sells furniture, is more welcoming than others and not involved in serious illegal business like other groups must be. The artist gained access to Avliza through her acquaintance with 2-3 families and the friendship and support of one in particular.³⁶⁰ Even with them, amongst TAMA's team it was basically the artist who could communicate more intimately. Neither the existence of diverse groups, nor the collaboration with members of just one, are mentioned anywhere in TAMA.

Furthermore, in discussions I was strongly discouraged from visiting Avliza, especially alone. The community could be quite unwelcoming to strangers.³⁶¹ A justification was that the Roma used the spaces between their homes like their own living rooms and disliked strangers entering them. This explanation sounded like a contradiction to TAMA's identity as a *public* art project. Eventually, as challenging as conceptual ambiguities of categories such as private-public might be for artists, architects, theorists or curators (e.g., Avliza's streets as private spaces, personal relations turned to public art) the conceptual challenge does not necessarily suffice to justify the interference into "other" peoples' "public" spaces.

The installations and environments of TAMA presented in art exhibitions comprised, for instance, makeshift dwellings, pieces of furniture, photographs and videos. These displays were created by the artist to represent the project as an experience of Avliza.³⁶² The community was thus represented in, rather than co-presenting TAMA. As should become clearer in the following section, the same could be said more generally about the Avliza community being represented rather than co-presenting the project and itself in it, especially from the point on that TAMA opened up to stronger agents in the artworld.

As already mentioned, the artist's initiative was triggered by her own fascination with and interpretation of the *different* image of Avliza ("unexpected events," "strange people"). Thus indicating their different culture, but always in the eyes of the beholder and without attention to internal differentiations (e.g., various groups,

with varying degrees of integration into Greek society).³⁶³ Consequently, despite the artist's honesty of intentions, respect and commitment towards Avliza's inhabitants, the project essentially reproduced the aestheticization of Roma people as fascinating, exotic "Other," and their marginalization as a social minority dependent upon a mediating agency to represent their interests to Greek society.³⁶⁴

In conclusion, one could say that the portrait of Avliza as eventually rendered in TAMA expressed the artist's vision and the project's needs, more than the details of its subject-matter. Additionally, the position of the community in the process of the creation, presentation, evaluation and discourse of the project raises various questions. More often than not they were framed and represented by the artist, rather than co-presenting themselves, even when some of them were present. Their own agency was limited, limiting their cultural identity within the shells of stereotypes and their aesthetic agency within their image as rendered by the artist. In this respect, one might eventually wonder what would have been different with regard to agency, had the project not been a participatory one.

The art world

In the premises of TAMA's proposal of juxtaposing the socially marginalized Roma people and the art people as equivalent "others" and partners in an "Autonomous Museum," there were a couple of important points that went conspicuously unnoticed. In a country full of cultural heritage sites and museums, there was no national museum for modern and contemporary art. Especially avant-garde expressions have for decades been treated by officials as less important or unfit compared to a glorious national cultural past. Up until the 1990s contemporary art producers were a bit like the "disenfranchised other" on the Greek cultural scene. For Greek artists, cultural institutions were an object of desire at times when elsewhere they were an object of critique.³⁶⁵ Under these conditions, art's autonomy was partly connected with its entrance into public institutions - as opposed to only private support - rather than to its independence thereof. These points about the status of contemporary art production and the notion of autonomy in a Greek context indicate how categories and concepts might have a different content in peripheral modernities, even Western ones, compared to an originally theorized canon. Even if it appears as if we are all talking about the same thing - here, the condition of autonomy for critical art.

Looking into the content of TAMA, the relations that the artist set out to establish with Avliza as source of inspiration and constant point of reference included also, as she explained, "myself, the art people and the public."³⁶⁶ In Efi Strousa's words they included individuals from amongst "her [i.e. the artist's] own circle of friends: architects, artists and others."³⁶⁷ This circle expanded, the more known the project became:

Over the last two months before the project's official presentation at the Biennale of Sao Paulo, her action plan was embraced by an increasing number of supporters, from individual enthusiasts to major forces in the art world, which will sponsor/donate the specific building, services and other parts of the infrastructure proposed by the TAMA for the community of Avliza.³⁶⁸

In their overwhelming majority, the involved agents are connected to the Greek contemporary art and architecture scenes. As explained at the end of the section on “The artist and her project” agents from the art field were invited to contribute to TAMA’s process in art-related capacities (e.g., critics, collectors). This involvement constituted an aim (establishment of relations) as well as method and content (particular collaborators or contributors) of the project. In that respect, the practice of professional relations coincides with the artistic practice. This leads to a situation where relations of production in the professional artistic field operate within the realm of art, formally perceived as an aesthetic realm, or a realm of representations. At the same time and in the same capacity they also operate in the realm of art world relations through which the artwork is also presented to the world, and where art’s relation with the world (e.g., as representation or intervention) is constantly negotiated and legitimized (e.g., by means of art’s critique, consumption or institutional support).

If relations with the Avliza community raised doubts regarding the inhabitants’ presentation and representation as subjects or objects in TAMA, the same cannot be maintained about contributors from the field of art production. Here I will try to show that the latter’s positions, roles and interests as both participants in TAMA and as art field agents, coincided. Consequently, they co-operated much more smoothly as subjects in the production and presentation of the art project. Hence, also, it can be argued that the project was more representative of practices and interests of these agents, than of the Avliza community. But do not let me run ahead of the text. Below I will first briefly provide a theoretical background of the understanding of the “art field” for this case study. Afterwards, I will discuss the formation and operation of art world relations in TAMA.

It has probably become apparent through the terminology employed (the field of artistic production, agents, objective relations) that I understand here the structure and mechanisms of relations between artists, curators, collectors etc. in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological approach to the field of cultural production.³⁶⁹ As part of his study of cultural practices in general, Bourdieu developed the concept of the “field” (e.g., economic, political, cultural) within which different agents act. In Bourdieu’s social theory:

Pierre
Pourdieu.
The field of
cultural
production

Agents do not act in a vacuum, but rather in concrete social situations governed by a set of objective social relations. To account for these situations or contexts, ... Bourdieu developed the concept of field (*champ*). According to Bourdieu’s theoretical model, any social formation is structured by way of a hierarchically organized series of fields (the economic field, the educational field, the political field, the cultural field etc.), each defined as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own laws of force independent of those of politics and the economy... Each field is relatively autonomous but structurally homologous with the others. Its structure, at any given moment, is determined by the relations between the positions agents occupy in the field. A field is a dynamic concept in that a change in agent’s positions necessarily entails a change in the field’s structure.³⁷⁰

Applying his theoretical model of the field to the production of culture, Bourdieu comes up with the so-called “field of cultural production” (or the cultural field), which he analyzes in the examples of the fields of artistic and literary production. For Bourdieu, the understanding of conditions and mechanisms of the cultural field’s structures is crucial for the interpretation of artistic or literary works:

...the full explanation of artistic works is to be found neither in the text itself, nor in some form of determinant social structure. Rather, it is found in the history and structure of the field itself, with its multiple components, and in the relationship between that field and the field of power.³⁷¹

To make the connection with what was said about our case study, TAMA practically speaking drew agents from the field of art production to the process of the artistic work’s creation. So their roles, operations and practices within the former field were also incorporated into the latter process.³⁷²

Bourdieu’s concept of the art field is relevant but not homologous to the term “art world.” The latter conveys a meaning of belonging to a group with common activities or interests. Bourdieu’s term by contrast, refers to internal structures, positions and functions of agents. Both terms are useful here. Furthermore, I also use the term “art scene” to designate a specific part of the Greek contemporary art field (or world), a “young generation” of art producers, to which I consider Papadimitriou to belong.

The agents among whom Papadimitriou moved as a professional artist, and whom she tried to mobilize by her artistic practice, belonged mainly to the Greek field of art production. A field with internal and external (in relation to the economic, social and political fields) formal and informal relations, hierarchies and norms. As I will explain in the following pages, the contemporary art world in the Greek cultural field had been regarded as poor relation. As such, it had received very little in terms of attention and investment from the political and economic fields until the past 15-20 years. It has been largely dependent upon private initiatives and support - means which could never compensate for the deficiencies of the public institutional sector. At the same time, the structural paradigms that agents had in mind reflected their education and connections to traditional European centers of modern art, such as Paris, Berlin or Rome. Consequently, Bourdieu’s model, though in need of revision for today’s globalized art world, may still maintain stronger relevancy for some local art fields. Nonetheless, to return to Papadimitriou’s case, by appropriating and transforming into art the system of relations, hierarchies and norms of the art field, she proved this field also to be subject to appropriations and transformations into a completely different order, art, even if only for the duration of her Temporary Museum.

With the above in mind, it is time to turn to the agents and to analyze their positions, roles and agendas in TAMA, how these re-present the artistic field, and what consequences this merging entails for art.

At the beginning of the TAMA book and under the title “Up to this point the contributors to the projects are:... ” there is a list of names, featuring also each person’s capacity, in which their contribution should be considered.³⁷³ The list names ten residents of Avliza, thirteen artists, twenty architects, seven curators, art critics

or art historians, a galerist, a film director, a dermatologist, a singer, a writer, a set designer, two clarinet players, a lawyer. There is a separate list of those who were also “Participants in the catalogue” as well as one list of the six “Sponsors of the Avliza TAMA.”

The contributors’ list equalizes and homogenizes individuals. Considering, however, the importance of the architectural plan for TAMA I would suggest calling the architects Dora Papadimitriou and Hariclia Hari *collaborators*, rather than contributors. Similarly, the same characterization, collaborators, I would apply to Yorghos Tzirtzilakis and Efi Strousa.³⁷⁴ Their role appears instrumental and multifaceted. Not only did they wind the activities initiated by Papadimitriou in Avliza into a coherent project, but their theoretical framework also tuned TAMA to timely global discourses of urbanization, migration, nomadism, and hybrid art and architecture interventions. Additionally, I believe that the professional expertise and prestige of the collaborators involved had a special function in legitimizing TAMA’s artistic status and special value within the local artistic field.³⁷⁵ This function was crucial, considering that in Greece there were no recorded precedents of community, participatory/collaborative art practices, and that the contemporary art field and market had a rather local bourgeois character. Besides, in the absence of strong organized structures and discourses in the contemporary art field, individuals may assume strong “institutional” roles or power, legitimizing people, practices and discourses. In the case of curators and theoreticians this may occur by virtue of their symbolic capital and prestige. In other cases, it is social, economic or political capital that play a role. This is a very important point, because it brings us to the prominent role of private initiative for Greek art and its relation to governmental policies and practices. This relation is accurately represented in TAMA.

To be more concrete, until approximately twenty years ago, almost any initiative (e.g., a curator making an exhibition or a collector establishing a museum) was supported by the private sector.³⁷⁶ This was not because, as occurred in the United States, the Greek state had given its blessings to the private sector to run and fund cultural institutions. But simply because the state ignored modern and contemporary art production. Unless it manifestly related either to certain interpretations of ancient and mediaeval (Byzantine) national cultural heritage, or to a modern ideology of “Greekness” in culture, often constructed between nationalism and folklore. Such approaches to national culture have for decades also been embraced by Greek society at large.

Thus it was private initiative that organized the bulk of activity within the contemporary art field, legitimizing people, practices and discourses. The stronger private initiatives have traditionally been dependent upon bourgeois social and economic elites and the local art market. Under these circumstances neither the private bourgeois patrons, nor Greek society and political life ever came to regard artists so much as social actors, but, much more as national and ideological figures. Consequently, avant-garde practices, including social interventions by artists and any relevant discourses, were paid insufficient attention to, or were scantily recorded as such.³⁷⁷

As artistic education was rather weak, generations of Greek artists have studied and pursued individual careers abroad.³⁷⁸ For many, returning to Greece meant

taking several steps backwards artistically and professionally. A conviction of a de-facto superiority of Western art centers has been a perennial spring of inferiority complexes, discontent and self-pity, “formatting” the minds and works of generations of Greek contemporary art producers.³⁷⁹

This mentality seems to have started changing from approximately the early 1990s, with the emergence of a younger art scene. This scene was increasingly vibrant, ambitious and oriented towards an international mainstream of art Biennials and magazines, and away from anything considered as outdated Greek-centered parochialism and inferiority complexes. Even if this distance-taking constituted in essence a latent determining parameter in their artistic directions. I would consider Papadimitriou, as well as the majority of invited contributors to TAMA as connected to this scene. In fact Papadimitriou and her project TAMA could be considered as exemplary cases. After graduating in Paris, the artist claimed that she had decided not to stay abroad. She was curious to find out why in Greece things seemed to be “stuck” in the arts, and she wanted to become “an international artist, but based in Greece. ... We have a beautiful country, why should I live, for instance, in Berlin?” Accordingly, TAMA was an exemplary project in that it contextualized a timely Greek social issue (ethnic minorities) within international artistic tendencies (open-ended art forms, artistic engagement) and theoretical discourses (urbanization, nomadism, globalization etc).

The increasing activities of this younger art scene met with support from private collectors, to whom sponsors of TAMA also belong.³⁸⁰ The most active amongst these collectors have been aligning up the focus of their private collecting and other art-related activities (exhibitions, publications, establishment of art foundations) with an interest in international mainstream art (here Dakis Joannou), and/or with a role of patron for the local art field (here Alpha Bank/Costopoulos Foundation, Prodromos Emfietzoglou). Their activities supplement those of the quite young public art institutions (museums, art centers) in recording, processing and presenting a history of local avant-garde art.³⁸¹ The involvement of these collectors has played a crucial role in backing financially as well as in rearranging power structures within the art field. Their support of a promising art project like TAMA should not be narrowly considered as financially and symbolically beneficial exclusively for the project. When artists from a peripheral scene advance with international careers, their success might add generally to the international prestige and capital of the local scene to which they are attached, including the private collectors and their collections.

Cultural heritage understood as national culture is considered probably the greatest national asset of Greece, in the name of which all national liberation and even civil wars were fought. However important private initiatives and patronage might be, the official decision-making, financing and implementation of cultural policies are supposed to emanate and be managed from within the Ministry of Culture. Therefore the general expectation has always been that the state would eventually be the main patron of contemporary culture as well. The question of establishing a national modern or contemporary art museum, which had preoccupied generations in the field of artistic production until it was realized in 1997 for Thessaloniki and 2000 for Athens, had always had the state through the Ministry of Culture as its final addressee.

In recent years, official policies have shown a shift of interest and support towards contemporary artistic production. Indeed, the case of the Ministry of Culture supporting a project that was exposing the backyard of the proud Greek culture - the disenfranchised Roma minority, the lack of institutional provision for contemporary art – can count symbolically as an exceptional achievement. This would be the achievement of the artist and, indirectly, of the entire set of contemporary art producers presented as contributors to and eventually represented as an art field in TAMA. Of course nothing is for free. TAMA functioned as flagship project for the face of a culturally and socially progressive state hosting the 2004 Olympic Games. Once the artist's practice of a strategic promotion of partnerships for the implementation of the art project's infrastructure reached the practice of professional Greek politicians, the politics of aesthetics were attuned to the aesthetics of politics – in the sense of temporary illusions of promises serving other ends.³⁸²

To sum things up, in all the aforementioned examples of relations produced by TAMA with art field agents as part of the art practice, one sees that the agendas, roles and positions of these agents in the art project and in “real” life appear to coincide. Taking the production process of these relations as well as those with the Avliza community as constituting the form and operation of the process-based art project, then the project indeed constitutes a form of representation of relations - cultural, social and political - in the “real” (art)world.

Conclusions about TAMA

Let me herewith try to bring together what I have tried to show with the production of relations as art in TAMA. From the moment the artist herself became involved with the images and community of Avliza, to the point when “higher ranks” in the local and international art world were reached, the very same questions were constantly negotiated: What is the relation of art to life? What constitutes the art work? And how does it function? These questions were obvious already in the title of *The Temporary Autonomous Museum for All* and in the proposal of taking images of relations from the social and cultural “Other” at home (Roma in Greece), but also taking the image of the “Self” in and out of home (Greek art in national and international social and cultural contexts) to reconsider the relation between art and life.

I have tried to show that these negotiations were staged in or through the process of producing relations as art. And that agents engaged at any given moment and the “politics” of power relations between them each time re-configured the relations produced, and thus also the aesthetic outcome of the project.

For these negotiations the Roma settlement in Avliza was the trigger for the artist to set it all in motion. However, their position and role in the process of making TAMA seems to have been gradually moving from being close to and co-presenting with the author-subject, to becoming represented. In the end, and despite whatever intentions the artist might have had, their image as a culturally exotic and socially marginalized “Other” seems essentially not to have been challenged but preserved.

As for the involvement of other agents, in early stages, when invited artists, writers, sociologists and so on were drawing, writing or offering some other creative contribution, the project functioned as a laboratory of images and ideas for the

redistribution of meanings by the means of art, and of the meanings of art itself. At the point when TAMA drew contributions from agents with various kinds of power in the circulation and distribution of the value of artworks - such as Biennial curators, collectors and cultural policy makers - the redistribution of the meanings of art was played out at symbolic, economic and political levels: consecration by the establishment, attribution of both market value and national representation status.

It should not be underestimated that the above relations and processes (i.e. of production, circulation and legitimization) contribute to the redistribution of what makes art and what art makes. Especially as they simultaneously operated for the art work externally (as relations of production) and internally (as relations of creation, collective authorship initiated and framed by the artist). And it is interesting that while these simultaneous processes were already taking place and were even openly stated (see establishment of relations as an aim of the art project) their operation remained publicly invisible or undebated. Instead a rhetorical use of notions of utopia, autonomy, criticality and community-based public art was persistently sustained, even though the conditions of these notions were already subverted since the practice had entered a different aesthetic order of how forms from life might be rendered into forms of art. This was an aesthetic order in which relations from “real” life were not as accurately rendered and represented in the intentions and visions of relations expressed in TAMA’s formal narrations, as they were in the project’s operational structure of relations. The relations that simultaneously produced TAMA as art, and were themselves produced by TAMA as art.



31 View of El Max (Alexandria), Egypt. 2004. Photo by the author.

2 GUDRAN FOR ART AND DEVELOPMENT

The artists and their project

Who we are

A group of artists: plastic artists, a filmmaker, a graphics designer, a musician and a fisherman from the Max. We are interested in using art as a method for development. Our aim is to improve the aesthetic taste and quality of marginalized communities while retaining their own individuality and uniqueness. ...

We dream of a community that enjoys a better cultural and artistic life, whose individuals live in a better aesthetic environment, that can invest its own individuality and its potentials, and that believes in art, appreciates aesthetics and is capable of expanding this concept and sustaining it.

Our mission

To initiate a link between art and development in order to improve marginalized communities by making use of their beauty and individuality; and to build on and improve them in order to create inspirational and replicable models.

Location

El Max is a suburb of Alexandria. Most of its population are fishermen. It is located between El-Werdéyan district – a very populated area of Alexandria; full of industries and leather factories – and El-Agami – an old suburb previously regarded as a summer resort and now a very populated district. It overlooks one of the Alexandria harbour gates.

The place has its own type. It looks as if it were a “Venice of the East”. The houses are built on the banks of an agricultural sewage canal. The banks are high forming a hill upon which the houses are built. The fishing boats are all docked in front of the houses and move from there to the sea.

The uniqueness of the place reflects the uniqueness of the people. It is a closed community with its own history and culture and heritage. However, it has seen hard times, for food is scarce and depends on the weather and whatever the sea brings. There are lots of other problems too; mainly, sewage, rubbish, healthcare, education, poverty, work and play hazards because of the rough nature of the area. ...

During the initial period we conducted research... We also focused on establishing relations with the residents of the neighbourhood to encourage their participation. ... The area suffers from a lack of cultural, environmental and social services.³⁸³

The artists who formed Gudran seemed much less preoccupied with contemporary aesthetics than Maria Papadimitriou.³⁸⁴ In the sense that their initiative was triggered by the impoverished life of population groups in Egypt, for which they put forward an understanding of art as tool. Being artists, they emphasized cultural and aesthetic characteristics of El Max and its people. In all the activities organized by Gudran in El Max for locals and guests - such as artistic workshops for locals or workcamps

with international artists and youths - Gudran members have been using their skills and contacts as artists, but with the primary target of community development.

Accordingly, the context within which Gudran operated as an artists' initiative with a social agenda could not be represented in Bourdieu's model of the field of art production. Gudran operated and gradually acquired visibility not only amongst art producers, but also within a wider context of cultural, humanitarian and development organizations active in Egypt. These had their attention, strategies and networks focused on Egypt as a country of the Middle East, the African developing world or the Mediterranean region, depending on each organization's particular focus.

For the question of the production of relations as art in process-based and participatory community projects, the two case studies of Gudran and TAMA complement one another. Even if Gudran prioritizes social change over artistic concerns, looking closer at the process of forming relations between the villagers, the Gudran artists and external agents as the project's operating structure back in 2004-05, there were interesting analogies with TAMA. Such analogies regard the formation of relations, as well as the representation of relations, roles and agendas of all involved agents that were produced in the process.

From TAMA it is important to bear in mind the idea that the formation of relations with the entire horizon of involved agents (i.e. the artworld for TAMA, the art and NGO networks for Gudran) comprises part of the project, not just of its production context. In what follows, I will argue both for the application of this perspective in Gudran, as well as for exploring for the consequences thereof. In my opinion, considering Gudran from the perspective of aesthetical consequences of the



31 View of El Max (Alexandria), Egypt. 2004. Photo by the author.

production of relations – meaning here the form of the operational structure of the production of relations, as well as the form of relations produced - these aesthetic outcomes outweigh the community development outcomes.

But this does not mean that aesthetic consequences are unrelated to social or political aspects. Again in a somewhat Rancièrian way, looking at the formation process of the projects from an aesthetical perspective, they give a form to and thus render sensible processes of wider social and political transformations.³⁸⁵ Consequently, by rendering them sensible they also render these transformations subject to critique, a critique that can partly take its forms of argumentation from the critique on the artistic projects. This is why Gudran, with its complex glo-cal context to which I will refer extensively below, may touch upon wider socio-political issues than TAMA and the often self-absorbed artworld context.

But let me not run ahead of the text and start first with a description of the project. *Gudran for Art and Development* was officially set up in El Max in 2001 and initially registered as NGO (Fig. 30-31, 35).³⁸⁶ As mentioned in the introduction, Gudran is principally the initiative of visual artists Sameh El Halawany and Aliaa El Gready, with the more or less temporary contribution of other individuals, most of them related to the art scene of Alexandria. Sameh and Aliaa had previous experience elsewhere in Egypt, where art was used in community development initiatives especially focused on children.

At first sight, the presentation of El Max in Gudran's official narrations as on their website (quoted here at the beginning), bore similarities to that of Avliza in TAMA. It was presented as a socially isolated ("closed") and economically weak community ("it has seen hard times"), situated at the fringes of an expanding city, Alexandria. Its special value was derived from what was regarded as a unique culture reflected in its image ("The uniqueness of the place reflects the uniqueness of the people," "A Venice of the East"). The social, economic and infrastructural problems described ("sewage, rubbish, healthcare, education, poverty") also echo the description of Avliza in TAMA, but are expressed in a more patronizing style (e.g., "Our aim is to improve the aesthetic taste and quality of marginalized communities").

However, art and aesthetics were understood as something missing in El Max. These were to be brought in thanks to the vision ("we dream of a community that enjoys better cultural and aesthetic life") and support of external agents, the artists (see: "our mission"). It is promoted by means of renovating and beautifying the village, educating the people. Whereas in TAMA, art and aesthetics were considered as inherent in the Roma's tactical ways of living and of inhabiting the place, including their settlement's makeshift character. Improvements addressed basic social and hygienic provisions (e.g., water and electricity supply), not touching the aesthetics of Avliza.

El Max 's economy relied on fishing and Alexandria relied on El Max for almost half of its fish. In discussions with Gudran artists, they explained that the growing development of the surrounding industry was causing marine pollution, while industrial interests also threatened El Max with land expropriation. Besides, according to descriptions I gathered from a guest to El Max, military units based nearby controlled the gates to the sea, occasionally preventing fishermen from going

to work.³⁸⁷ Therefore a concrete but not officially stated aim, was to empower the community and save the village by showing to the world that El Max had a very individual and therefore significant local culture. So Gudran set out to accentuate qualities of this unique culture, shape up the derelict infrastructure and establish communication channels with the outside world.

The various activities organized by Gudran included, for example, artistic and skills training workshops for local children and adults (e.g., drawing, clay, dressmaking), literacy classes for adults and dropouts, and work camps for international artists and youth. (Fig. 32-33) The Gudran artists functioned as intermediaries of relations and facilitators of activities. A building was renovated and brightly painted to serve as Gudran's headquarters, where also a video room, a library and a café/restaurant were situated. (Fig. 34-35) However, the most important activity was to renovate and "beautify" the place. They took motives traditionally painted on fishing boats and transferred them to walls.³⁸⁸ (Fig. 36-37)

This is the principle activity of the place. All other projects and activities flow from and into it. The idea is to re-structure the houses and the sewage system, and to renovate the houses by painting and drawing on them. This is done in an artistic manner by the locals and ourselves with the help of a team trained through the other arts workshops.³⁸⁹

In what follows the analysis of Gudran is structured on a similar pattern to that of TAMA, but in reverse order. For reasons of convenience, I will start with the supporting basis of art production in Egypt and then move on to relations at community level.



32 - 34 Gudran. El Max (Alexandria), 2001 ongoing. Video, drawing and dressmaking rooms. 2004. Photo by the author.



An artworld in the expanded field

Being an artists' initiative with a social program and NGO status, Gudran existed within a field comprised, on the one hand, of the local artworld and, on the other, of a system of Egyptian and international organizations and foundations that promote human rights, cultural diversity and sustainable development.³⁹⁰

Part of the art production is supported by the Fine Arts Sector, an arm of the Ministry of Culture.³⁹¹ It runs, for instance, some galleries, the museums, the Cairo and Alexandria art biennials, the so-called "cultural palaces" in various towns and the art academies.³⁹² This is the official face of contemporary cultural production that also represents the country abroad on official occasions such as the national participation in the Venice Biennial. This scene has access mostly to state funding and institutional positions (e.g., art professors or administrators). Generally speaking, the art included rather academic painting, sometimes handcrafts; rather uninteresting for the international contemporary mainstream. However, from approximately the late 1990s and as the Egyptian state has been under neo-liberalization pressures by the IMF and the United States, there have been attempts to also "update" the cultural face of the country. I believe that it must have been under these conditions that a project that proposed an art-for-development model quite similar to Gudran's, but of much larger scale and entirely backed by the Ministry of Tourism, started in Cairo in 1999. The so-called *Old Cairo Development Project* combined the restoration of the very touristic but also run-down area of Old Cairo, with a program for the sustainable social and economic development for the existing population.³⁹³

For artists who had more interest in relating to developments abroad an alternative way was to organize autonomous collaborative initiatives bringing together artists, curators, filmmakers, writers etc. This phenomenon became more visible from the late 1990s and in conjunction with the emergence of a private, commercial and non-commercial, art sector.³⁹⁴ Egyptian artists with careers in Biennials and exhibitions in contemporary art centers in Europe could be found here, but without this necessarily excluding their also maintaining contact with the state sector. This serves as a reminder again of the necessity not to take as generally applicable notions developed in Western art centers about "autonomy" or "criticality" of alternative art initiatives. In

her extensive sociological study of the Egyptian field of contemporary art production, Jessica Winegar emphasizes this point.³⁹⁵

Whether one saw oneself as more attached to the official or to the relatively autonomous art scene, with the one not excluding the other, practically everywhere there were aspirations for international recognition and collaborations. When support was needed for projects of any scale, there was a whole system of non-Egyptian organizations and foundations to





35 - 37 Gudran. El Max (Alexandria), 2001 ongoing. View of Gudran building and painted houses, 2004. Photos by the author.

approach. Gudran's status as NGO for a multifaceted cultural and environmental community development should be understood within this professional landscape.

More specifically, for decades organizations like UNESCO, Caritas and smaller humanitarian NGOs have officially operated for the stimulation and development of sustainable social services, emphasizing local collaborations and initiatives.³⁹⁶ A project that includes art within a social development frame might come under the umbrella of different NGOs not necessarily for financial, but also for administrative or logistic support, or just for reasons of networking, communication and the publicity of its activities.³⁹⁷ For instance in Table III there is information about Gudran's 2005 workcamp from the Unesco listings of Youth Volunteer Workcamps in the Middle East region. Table IV includes a selection of strategic objectives for 2002-07 from the mission statement of Unesco's cultural sector. The emphasis placed on standard-setting instruments, cultural diversity and dialogue, as well as on linkages between culture and development reminds one of Gudran's emphasis on replicable models, establishment of communication channels and the motto of art for development.

Significant support for cultural activities in Egypt is provided by the Ford Foundation (USA) and some also through EU schemes for the economic development of, as well as for cross-cultural communication between, Mediterranean countries. Table V contains the Ford's mission statement, which again reminds one of concerns emphasized by Gudran, such as poverty, international cooperation, human achievement. Gudran has been generously supported by the Ford, as shown on Tables VI-VII from the Foundation's 2003 and 2005 annual reports. On Table VIII from the European Union's open call for applications for community programs I have selected samples of calls specific to Mediterranean projects. Gudran's organization profile could fit into the "domains concerned," the legal status of "who can apply," the "regions" as well as the types of "financed activities."³⁹⁸ Despite the official political neutrality of large organizations like the Ford or the Mediterranean E.U. programs, they have important links to American and European financial and foreign policy interests, even if not directly visible ones. This is especially significant for the United States. Frances Stonor Saunders has presented in detail connections between U.S. foreign interests and the funding strategies of large philanthropic organizations including the Ford Foundation.³⁹⁹ Egypt, in particular, has since the 1970s been officially amongst the largest recipients of U.S. humanitarian and development assistance, especially through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The latter has during the 1990s paid special attention to the growth of the local NGOs sector, to which Gudran also belongs.⁴⁰⁰

Local NGOs constitute in fact an immense sector. According to Mervat Tellawi, Minister of Social Affairs and Insurance, in 1999 there were some 14,600 NGOs, about 60% of which she estimated as active.⁴⁰¹ NGOs in the Middle East in general have played an extremely important, but also problematic role during the 1990s. In the words of Lauri King Irani, editor of the *Middle East Report*: "In much of the Middle East NGOs have been to the 1990s what resistance groups and popular unions of students, workers and professionals were to the 1970s: the defining organizational form of the period."⁴⁰² NGOs have provided services in domains such as human rights, environmental education, rural development, women's rights, literacy training and legal reform. While according to Krista Masonis El-Gawhary referring in particular

to Egypt: “Nowhere in the Middle East have expectations of NGOs been as high as in Egypt. And nowhere else do they command such vast resources and prestige.”⁴⁰³ All this is quite important here, since the Gudran team also opted for NGO status. The above described operational framework of NGOs demonstrates that this status has for a period been the most accommodating for various kinds of initiatives wishing to have relative autonomy from state control. But it drew them into the mechanisms of another system of dependency relations, often as opaque as those of the state.

Furthermore, there are different foreign Schools and Institutes with varying degrees of activity and potential to support, such as the Goethe Institute, the Swedish Institute, the French school, Prins Claus Fund, Prohelvetia, the Foundation for Hellenic Culture. The cultural role of at least some of these is somewhat schizophrenic, as their origins relate to colonialism and the continuation of their presence is partly due to their respective countries intention of maintaining a foothold in the developing world. Nonetheless, nowadays any politically acceptable mission and rhetoric, in accordance with postcolonial sensitivities in the West and many people’s true intentions, is more likely to emphasize the stimulation and reinforcement of cross-national communication and cultural production, rather than a one-way dissemination of any given Western country’s culture in Africa or the Middle East. This is translated into collaborative projects between local (Egyptian) cultural producers and producers from the respective institution’s country. The model of the Gudran international workcamps bears similarities to this tradition of collaborations and exchanges.

Late 20th century developments in communication and transport have greatly facilitated contacts and exchanges around the globe between individuals or groups with similar interests. It is really impossible to keep up with the number and types of networks and meeting events organized among artists’ initiatives. To stick to my case study, in 2002 Aliaa El Geady participated in a meeting in the Cameroon organized by the art group Kapsiki Circle, in collaboration with the French group “Urban Scenography.”⁴⁰⁴ The idea for Gudran artists’ workcamps came about as a follow-up to that meeting. Furthermore, Gudran can be found amongst participants in projects organized with some connection to the Amsterdam-based European Cultural Foundation (ECF). ECF is an independent organization promoting cultural production and exchange especially in Europe’s periphery and the Mediterranean rim.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, Gudran was included also in the 6th sequence of the project *Going Public* titled “Atlante Mediterraneo” in 2006. *Going Public* is based in Modena, Italy, and functions as a platform for meetings, discussions, publications and collaborative projects between artists and collectives working in a wide range of engaged public art. TAMA was included in *Going Public 3*: “Soggetti, Luoghi e Politiche.”⁴⁰⁶ To add one last, interesting example, albeit again later than my research time-frame, Gudran participated in a workshop organized by PPC_T, a Greek site-specific program of participatory activities with a community of Repatriated Greek-Pontics living in a place called Farkadona. PPC_T started in 2005 as an initiative of architect Hariclia Hari, one of Maria Papadimitriou’s collaborators in TAMA.⁴⁰⁷

Now, there are two important things to say here about networks in general and art networks since the 1990s in particular. Firstly, according to network theory approaches (social network theory) “reality should be primarily conceived and investigated

from the view of the properties of relations between and within units instead of the properties of these units themselves. It is a relational approach.³⁴⁰⁸ Which in our case means that the distinctive local content of each artists' organization's work is not as important for its role as a node in the network, as is its practice of keeping active within the network. Secondly, especially for artists' organizations the practice of entering into more or less temporary alliances has, on the one hand, been incorporated into the artistic practice of numerous individuals or collectives. This practically speaking is what this chapter is all about: considering the production of whatever relations were formerly understood as relations of production or context, as becoming part of the art, and analyzing them as such. While, on the other, this practice has also at the same time caused a restructuring of the institutional sector of art. Networks themselves have given rise to new forms of institutionalization. Hence, also, visibility, partnerships, affiliations and activity within networks tend to be regarded as criteria for an organization's character and success. These are often becoming more visible and determining parameters in an organization's assessment than the actual content of its distinctive, site-specific work. In our case, that would be Gudran's community work in El Max.

To conclude this section, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that for a collective artists' initiative like Gudran, the support from or involvement with particular partners and networks can be determining in many respects. Keeping the necessary activity going for maintaining contacts with Egyptian or foreign institutions, organizations or other networks of all the aforementioned sorts can be a full-time job. And it may indeed influence choices of official legal status (e.g., as NGO), typology of activities (e.g., literacy classes, infrastructural development) and rhetoric (e.g., as in missions statement). This is important. In a developing country like Egypt that is also part of a politically sensitive region, here the Middle East, there are constellations of local and global organizations and networks, which may have an important influence in local cultural production. In practice, one can consider them in terms of an artworld in the expanded field. It can be regarded as such, even if art production claims a really minimal share compared to the large interests sustaining the activities in this mixed sector. Therefore it must be emphasized that the continuity and density of the constellation of organizations and networks in any given region depend primarily on the region's specific geopolitical significance or state of development, rather than on its art.⁴⁰⁹

Looking into artistic grassroots practices

For the previous case study I touched upon problematic aspects in the re-presentations of the Avliza Romani in TAMA in the project's narrations. It is fair to say that TAMA's narrations stated that it was all primarily about Avliza in the eyes of the artist, and thus also any social or even political issues were touched upon through the aesthetic questions. Nonetheless, the more successful the project became in circles of mainstream art, the more the Avliza inhabitants seemed to move from the position of subjects-participants in the making of TAMA, to that of subject-matter. Moreover, the final image of relations rendered in the project allowed their aesthetic exoticism and social marginalization to remain unchallenged, regardless of the artist's initial vision.

Here I will take advantage of the availability on internet of narrations by individuals involved in community activities by Gudran in El Max. I have selected extracts from an interview and from a diary, which express positive responses, but also include points that may raise skepticism.

My first source is a 2004 interview published in Al Ahram Weekly with two of Gudran's volunteers: Damien, a Belgian who taught photography, and Rami Fawzi, an Egyptian/Jordanian who worked as Social Affairs Manager. Extracts are reproduced here in Table IX. They start by explaining what triggered Sameh and Aliaa to take action in El Max. The combination of aesthetic qualities of the village's culture and external appearance, with its precarious socioeconomic situation, are reminiscent of motives put forward also for TAMA. However, as noted there as well, the parameter of indigenous aesthetic qualities can easily slip into the trap of limiting the representation and development models of the local community to assumptions of authenticity based on traditions. And as art curator and critic Gerardo Mosquera has signaled regarding the shaping of identities in the post-colony:

To affirm cultural identity in tradition, understood in a sense of "purity," is a colonial heritage. It led to disastrous cults of "authenticity," "roots," and "origins," above all in the postcolonial era when the new countries attempted to affirm their identities and interests against the metropolises and their imposed westernizations.⁴¹⁰

Both in policy statements of international humanitarian and development organizations, as well as in personal statements by individuals (Damien b, Table IX) one sees the ex-colonizers' concern that their help should not re-colonize the addressee. Sometimes, communities in the developing world may appear to maintain in their daily life aspects of social or production relations from traditional societies. It might therefore be difficult to distinguish between, on the one hand, the contemporary cultural moment and, on the other, assumptions of cultural traditions when dealing with such communities. However this should not be used as easy excuse. For instance, the curatorial expeditions to discover art from peripheral countries, especially after the 1989 Paris exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, often did not care for nuanced readings of contemporary non-Western cultures. Or, once again pointed out by Mosquera, they consciously opted to place value on art that "explicitly manifests difference, or that better satisfies the expectations of otherness held by postmodern neoexoticism."⁴¹¹

To move along with analyzing elements in the interview, Damien mentioned problems of drug abuse and crime (Damien a), which were nowhere to be found in Gudran's descriptions of El Max. Problems such as these, as symptoms of the village's socioeconomic degradation, are essentially caused by what led to that degradation. In this case, significant causal factors appear to have been the threat of the villagers' living environment and the obstruction of their daily work, posed by the presence of the industry and the military basis. There seems to have been a disregard of the rights of El Max inhabitants not to be see their living and working environment threatened. These would be basic civil, i.e., political rights. Nonetheless, it was not political rights that were registered and addressed in the development program for El Max, but, rather, some of the social and economic symptoms of the

infringement of these political rights (e.g., poverty, lack of education). There are reasons that could, I assume, explain why Gudran would not openly address issues of either political rights, or drug abuse and crime in El Max. On the one hand, by choosing to officially address the problems of El Max by using art as development tool - a cultural-social perspective - I believe that they had to include problems that can be accepted as addressable by the means of art. This would be difficult for actions prosecuted by law, such as drug abuse and crime. On the other hand, not all oppositional political debate is tolerated by Egyptian state authorities. Presenting the problems of El Max as a political issue would have probably condemned from the outset any activist initiative the Gudran initiators would have attempted to take. Arguments such as these can indeed justify the artists' choices. But at the same time they also indicate the limitations of their initiative, which might in the worse scenario even unwittingly help keep some foundational political issues unchallenged and undebated.

The numerous activities organized by Gudran enriched life in the village and opened up new horizons especially for the younger. Nonetheless, it is striking to read that in a project so much emphasizing local cultural heritage, the selected development tool, art, was alien to the village (Ramy a). It follows that an entire new horizon of cultural, educational and leisure activities was imbued, restructuring practices and conceptions of everyday life, including the distribution of time (e.g., introduction of leisure time) and spaces (e.g., introduction of a designated meeting place, Gudran's building). As we read further down, the Gudran building and activities offered women for the first time with a place and occasions to meet creating "a sense of community," all of which, as presumed, they lacked (Ramy c). However, if Ramy's sayings reflect Gudran's presumptions, then this lack of a sense of community is defined as a lack of *visible* manifestations *in public* of community practices (e.g., organized occasions in designated public spaces), for which the Gudran building and activities such as workshops, collective renovation work on buildings, attendance of the art festival etc. compensated for. Consequently, a particular conception and practice of a category of public seems to have been introduced to the community and credited cultural priority. As discussed further down with regard to the second source, there are instances when interventions "in public" by invited artists participating to workcamps seemed to collide against mentalities in the village. All these processes entail an amount of presumptions or assumptions on the side of the Gudran team of what is "good" and what is "bad" in culture. Or, to be more fair probably, what is "good" and what is "bad" for the position of a small group within a larger socio-political and economic context, since the ultimate point of Gudran's cultural program was the viability of El Max altogether in contemporary Egypt. Nonetheless, the thoughts I have expressed in this paragraph seem to contradict the premises of Gudran's rhetoric regarding the value of El Max' "unique culture."⁴²

Finally, Damien and Ramy referred to a "big event coming up," which was the artists' workcamp Boustachy 01 and the exhibition planned for its closure (Damien d, Ramy d). They emphasized the size of the event, its international character, impressive presentation setting (theater on boats) and the collaborative and interactive working format of the whole endeavor. Below, I will turn to this workcamp and exhibition event through the diary of one of the participating artists, Sue Williamson.

On Table X I have taken extracts of Sue's diary as published online. She recorded and reflected upon her experiences from the encounter between the artists, the villagers and the Gudran team. Sue is a South Africa-based artist with an international career. Reading her diary, she is throughout disarmingly honest about what she thought regarding the practical and qualitative limitations of the art produced during the workcamp. Both ethically, as "certain topics should not be broached... for fear of causing offence" (Wed., Sept. 15), as well as artistically, since "this is not an arena for sophisticated conceptual work" (Sat., Sept. 18). The result only confirms that, as not everything could "go forwards as it would in Europe or the States, or *even* South Africa" (emphasis mine, Wed., Sept. 29, last day of Boustachy 01). Her thoughts reflected the situation in which NGO and community art had become for some Western art critics a synonym – even if often arrogantly – for art of good intentions and poor quality.⁴¹³ This critique mostly overlooked the importance of the creative working process, which Sue also accentuated in her warm words about her communication and exchange experiences in El Max (Sun., Sept. 19, Fri., Sept. 24, Mon. Sept. 27, Wed. Sept. 29). Nonetheless, the question remains of why should communities be collectively represented by something evaluated as second-rate, let alone not theirs, since "art has not figured amongst customs and traditions" in El Max.

Sue's diary was also quite revealing about problems the artists faced during their work. For them the projects moved too slowly (Sun., Sept. 19), while strong misgivings regarding the hosting organization and the integrity of its aims were expressed in Hicham Benohoud's criticisms of "MADE MAX" (Mon. Sept. 20). In the days after Hicham's departure, artists were continuously facing problems and resistance by locals. The prominent example was Jean Christophe Lanquetin's adventures with his rooftop installation (Fri., Sept. 24 & Wed. Sept. 22 - Tue Sept. 28). Initially it took a bit of time to find a house for which he would be given permission to erect an installation with local materials. A couple of days after he found one, the father of the man who granted him permission expressed fears of the structure being against the Koran and withdrew permission. Once his fears were removed, he was picked up by the police for complaining, but was thankfully released the day after. And when finally Jean Christophe managed to build up his installation, the nets he had used disappeared in the night. This sequence of events revealed the difficult symbiosis of contemporary public art with the combination of Islamic law, state policing, but also small-scale crimes that together played a role in the daily life of locals. Sue recounts also difficulties that Francois Duconseile (Sat., Sept. 25) and Gilles Touyard (Tue., Sept. 28) encountered. Altogether, despite Gudran's warnings of local conservative ethics and the artists' compliance (Wed, Sept. 15), the presence and projects of the artists crashed against religious fears (Jean-Christophe), authorities' restrictions (Jean-Christophe and Francois) and local codes of private-public differentiations (Gilles). It seems as if it was all about the villagers getting used to all those new things, because that was the way to development, whether they understood it or not. Finally, what Damien had described as an up-coming "big event," an "international exhibition" with an open air theatre on boats, filmed for "audiences from all over the world" (Table IX) resulted to an exhibition opening where "there is not all that much to see" and "the mood is subdued" (Table X, Wed., Sept. 29).

Taking into account all the above, there seem to have been inconsistencies

between the stated agendas of Gudran and community level practices. Various assumptions, external additions, a slightly patronizing and officially a-political character, all manifest problematic aspects in the grassroots process of realizing Gudran. Similarly to TAMA, the obvious question is whether these process-based projects as participatory/collaborative processes of relations' formation led the communities to becoming subjects or not of their own re-presentations.

Conclusions about Gudran

To sum things up for Gudran, on the one hand, I have tried to show the relations between Gudran as an artists' organization and the institutional fields and networks that supported cultural production in Egypt. Especially with respect to socially engaged art, this field was comprised not only of art institutions, but also, quite importantly, of a system of foreign humanitarian and development organizations and programs, foreign cultural institutions as well as international art and art-related networks.

In essence it is the second category that had the capital and status to support any local initiatives that opted for exchanging relative autonomy from the government cultural sector for relative dependency from the NGOs sector. While at the same time, the emergence and growth since the 1990s of a private art sector, but most importantly the growth of networks of art or other group initiatives sharing similar concerns, were all indicative of relations between the production of new forms of communication and exchange, and new forms of both artistic practices as well as art institutional practices. Within this context, Gudran's organizational profile, as well as partnerships it pursued, seemed to function very well.

On the other hand, looking closer at Gudran's relations in El Max through the narrations of Ramy, Damien and Sue one finds problems between Gudran's stated agendas and the process of their realization. For instance, fundamental to the village's future development was the use of a set of selected, if not invented elements of traditional culture (e.g., transferring the symbolic motives painted on boats onto walls, intervening in forms of socialization and into categories of private-public). Further problematic aspects were the patronizing and neo-exoticization effects that such external interventions might entail, and, indeed, the gaps between stated aspirations (e.g., infrastructural development, ambitious art events) and what was realized till 2005 (painting facades, the workcamp's outcomes as narrated by Sue).

In view of all the above it seems fair, but also far too easy, to say that Gudran's supporting context – the art scene, the various organizations and networks – determined the form of its practices. Which would include the form of involvement of El Max locals in activities such as workshops, literacy classes, restoration of the infrastructure, voluntary international work camps and any other activities that echoed their benefactors' strategies and programs. That would mean that Gudran simply fulfilled expectations. Instead of stopping at the easy conclusions, I would rather suggest considering Gudran with the same terms as TAMA. Thus all parameters of the support, production-process and reception of the Gudran organization, including the interdependency of their complicated and often opaque relations, should be seen *together* to comprise the project. To constitute its art form. Then the art project, as

it were, takes back a representational function, representing wider structures in the society within which, and in response to which, it was produced. Rather than just representing the culture of the community of El Max. To explain what exactly I mean by that, let me interpret how I see everything I discussed linking together.

In Sue's diary, it seemed that being present, experiencing and relating to the place and people involved in Gudran were more significant aspects than the individual artists' works and their final big exhibition. Between the lines one could discern what "implementing a project" meant: it meant that events *did* take place, people *were* there, interviews *were* given. That the whole structure set up by Gudran in El Max *did* function. It functioned as a shell within which one could develop smaller, individual initiatives of social, environmental or artistic character. As such, the Gudran project itself reproduced in smaller scale the shell-function and respective structure of the organizations and networks that supported and framed it. It was only in the explicit or implicit misgivings of Sue and Damien - the foreign grassroots work volunteers - that we saw reference to the concrete content of what was produced by Gudran, as well as to the ethical and aesthetic standards thereof.

Nonetheless, regarded from the outside, the Gudran project as a shell structured by a site-specific application of the existing system of relations between the art scene and the constellation of further organizations, it actually performed and functioned very well. For artists in Egypt and Alexandria in particular, Gudran created a platform that could bring to them the latest of the international socially engaged or activist art scene. They became nodes in international networks with their very own, large-scale project. Even better, Gudran drew inspiration from the cultural background of Egypt, but neither from the tourist face of antiquity, nor from the nostalgia for Lawrence Durrell's or Kavafis' colonial era. In all that Gudran was much closer to the motives, practices and symptoms of engaged, site-specific initiatives from the periphery, as these have surfaced since the 1990s in international art or activism scenes and networks.

Furthermore, Gudran could be seen to represent both the best and the worst of policies and intentions on the side of the non-Egyptian organizations supporting it. Because it was too complex and difficult to discern what it all added up to: one could see it as a small-scale, focused initiative that did enrich, improve and protect certain aspects of everyday life in El Max. But, reversely, one could also argue that it eventually supported a consensus of accepting the pretension of humanitarian causes applied as rhetoric (see aims, mission statement) as well as the intervention of foreign interests (U.S, E.U.) against meager results (painted walls, temporary, if not problematic collaboration experiences during work camps, etc.). While it also used rather than challenged the neo-exoticization of local communities. As such, Gudran was but a representation of the contribution to development that the different cultural and humanitarian organizations active in the region could offer against, on the one hand, the huge needs of a developing ex-colony in the tense Middle East region and, on the other, the professional, economic and diplomatic relations that also sustain the cultural sector.

Final conclusions: from models for the real world to models of the real world

Let me herewith pull the strings together and return to the initial question of what

forms of art practices are produced when producing relations as art. One could say that in each case the artists set out to present the world with an ideal model of relations. But they eventually gave form to ideal representations of “real” world relations. They appropriated formal and informal practices from various fields as their artistic practices. Artistic, because regardless whether they termed the outcomes of their work art or not, in both cases they set out to work with their capacities and skills as artists. Which brings us back to an investigation, recalling Rancière, of what new forms of doing and making have been reconfigured within a domain of art, and what they “formulate” about the world.

To be more precise, for all the shortcomings in the participation, collaboration and representation of the communities, one cannot help noticing that the projects’ operated quite successfully in relation to their supporting structures (i.e. artworld or other). However, the latter relations are also part of the artists’ practice of setting up community-oriented initiatives with a local focus and global connections, as these have surfaced from the 1990s onwards around the globe. So a tactical incorporation of practices of formal or informal relations into artistic projects came to belong to the artists’ “ways of doing and making,” to artistic practices in an expanded field.

The structure and operation of the practice of producing relations as art is seldom analyzed for its possible functions as art. This is often due to the persistence of a rhetoric of the autonomy and utopianism of art from interests external to a pure creation process (e.g., artworld interests or the artists’ social commitment), while the artists’ practice has already invalidated those – rather modernistic – notions of artistic autonomy and utopia. The inherent contradictions between stated agendas and what eventually takes place, between globalization in the daily experience with local communities especially outside the West and the daily experience of global networking with similarly-minded groups are at the core of the artists’ practice. By reproducing everyday-life, professional or other practices as art, it is inevitable that they also re-produce the contradictions and frictions inherent in those practices. By doing so, as much as the artists “fail” to formulate ideals, they nonetheless did give form to social realities in transformation, rendering their processes “sensible” again in a kind of Rancièrian way. Processes that were otherwise difficult to capture, as they moved and changed at overlapping levels and speeds.

As a result, and despite this not being the artists’ intention, the criticism that seems so easy to make on the shortcomings of their projects can actually be re-produced back as a critique on the social or other practices that the artists initially re-produced as art.

One could probably even say that a parameter of autonomy and utopianism remains in the persistence of the artists to continue their endeavors even as trial and error, if they themselves suspect the discrepancies and frictions threatening to take over their initial intentions and ideals.

Finally, one might argue that this approach of producing relations as an artistic practice ends up overemphasizing form over content, which for relations also means networking over identity. This is not completely arbitrary. When a post-modern frenzy of seeing identities dissolved into simulacra and signs started receding in the face of the rapidly expanding social and economic globalization processes of the 1990s, giving rise to the prominent question of what Manuel Castels described as

“the bipolar opposition between the Net and the Self,” around which “[o]ur societies are increasingly structured.”⁴¹⁴ While, on the one hand,

[p]eople increasingly organize their meaning ... on the basis of what they are, or believe they are ... on the other hand, global networks switch on and off individuals, groups, regions, and even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling the goals processes in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions. It follows a fundamental split between abstract, universal instrumentalism, and historically rooted, particularistic identities.⁴¹⁵

On a micro-scale, this is what artists’ projects like TAMA and Gudran give form to. Not by means of what they say they do, but rather, by how their structures and operations develop and function.

Bureau Venhuizen, Brochure, pages 1-2, © 2003.

Bureau Venhuizen is a project management and research bureau active in the field of culture-based planning. The bureau focuses on settlement and planning processes in the context of spatial planning, taking culture as the point of departure. In this context, culture is broadly defined as cultural history, heritage and art, and also includes the collected contemporary cultures of a region’s residents. The bureau was founded by Hans Venhuizen, who acts as concept manager in these processes.

It is best to approach every context with your eyes peeled and with an inquisitive mind. Then you have the greatest chance of encountering surprising phenomena. The photographs ‘A to Z’ were taken by Hans Venhuizen. They are not directly linked with the projects managed by Bureau Venhuizen, but sooner provide an insight into Hans Venhuizen’s perspective as concept manager. Rather than exclusively taking photographs of attractively designed urban space or landscapes, Venhuizen focuses primarily on situations where the concept that was the point of departure for a specific result – whether an accidental or planned success or a fantastic failure – is clearly evident in the end result. The subjects include hybrid forms of historic culture applied in new ways with varying degrees of success; lies in which there is such a strong belief that they have pass for the truth; grotesque denials of distinctiveness based on the conviction that it should be something else; and phenomenal situations that have resulted from a sometimes almost absurd logic.